

ADDRESS
OF
JOHN DWYER

Hudson Falls, N. Y.

MAJOR 63D N. Y. V.

**Senior Officer Living of the Irish Brigade
Association**

THE 52D ANNIVERSARY
Held in New York City, December 12, 1914
Union Square Hotel

18
8
1

By transfer
The E. House

21

Comrades and Friends:

In compliance with the request of your presiding officer, I have prepared the story of Fredericksburg, an event that will forever remain green in the memory of the renowned Brigade, while one remains to answer the roll call on this side of the river—yea, while their sons and daughters are here to tell the deeds of their sires on December 13, 1862.

In our youthful days—in the Great Rebellion—one hundred thousand men on the side of the Union and as many more in the Confederate ranks, was an unusual thing. Today the War of Nations beyond the seas, three millions of young manhood of six or more countries are engaged in deadly strife. Instead of our one to three days' battle, in the old world they are counted in consecutive weeks and months; and if only fifteen or twenty thousand fall in a day, it is a mere "skirmish." Should this slaughter continue, the leading nations of Europe will in truth be nothing short of wilderness.

Comrades and friends! We should sincerely thank the good God that we call ourselves Americans, and that three thousand miles of ocean separate the Continents. Also that we have a captain guiding our ship of State—"Watching and Waiting," if you will—who has steered clear of European entanglements up to the present mo-

ment. "A sagacious man who today at the head of this nation, walks with recollected feet the imperiled path of peace."

But to the fair City by the Rappahannock—Fredericksburg:

The Right Grand Division under Sumner, found itself on the morning of the 13th of December, 1862, in battle array in the streets waiting for the word to assault the Heights, less than half a mile in our front, filled with the Veteran infantry of the Army of Northern Virginia, behind breastworks and on a plateau beyond. Every spot on which a field gun could be placed was brought into service, protected with earthworks. As though this was not sufficient the famous "stone wall" five feet high, ran along the base of the Heights, in a sunken road, where the infantry lay protected.

This formation was on the right of the Union Army's line, and the left of the Confederate's. The Left Grand Division was under the command of Franklin, one of the ablest soldiers of the Union Army. He held the Union left, which threatened the railroad from Lee's rear to Richmond. The extent of the Union line was less than five miles, entirely free from trenches or field works of any kind. Our description embraces only that part of the Union Army (Sumner's Grand Division) in Hancock's command—2d Corps, 1st Division, and Meagher's Irish Brigade, consisting of the 63d, 69th, 88th New York Infantry; 28th Massachusetts, and 116th Pennsylvania Infantry.

The assault was made in brigade lines; considerable interval between the commands. Gen. Thomas Francis Meagher commanded the Second Brigade (Irish). Capt. Joseph O'Neil, senior Captain present, led the 63d Regiment. Was badly wounded in the assault. After which Capt. Patrick J. Condon assumed command, until and after the close of the battle. No field officers of the 63d were on duty, owing to illness. The 69th Regiment was in command of Major James Cavanaugh (the "Little Major"). The 88th was led by Col. Patrick Kelly (Captain 14th United States Infantry). Subsequently killed. The 116th Pennsylvania had as commanding officer Lieut.-Col. St. Clair A. Mulholland (afterwards General, also Medal of Honor Man). The 28th Massachusetts was led by Col. Richard Byrnes (Captain 14th United States Infantry). Fell at Cold Harbor.

The Brigade line was somewhat demoralized in the advance by the presence of a mill-race, the frail bridges over which were destroyed by the enemy's guns. The men were compelled to wade through the stream and climb the opposite bank. This disorganized the line of battle. Having passed the obstruction, a grand rush for the enemy was in order. Previous to this, the infantry fire from the Confederates was not materially felt, but the field guns were much in evidence. Round shot, grape and canister swept through the ranks of these five regiments, but not for a moment did they halt until fire from the "stone wall" became deadly—a steady withering sheet of flame! This

called for a response in kind, and it came with a will, from what was left of those untouched by cannon or gun fire. Unfortunately the Union troops had no protection whatever, while the Confederates lay behind the "stone wall" on which musketry made no impression. Several lines of infantry were securely protected in this sunken road, and could load at leisure, and when ready come to the front, "fire and fall back."

No permanent relief for the Brigade was apparent, although other brigades of the 1st Division of the 2d Corps arrived and tried to advance beyond Meagher's line, but failed after a bloody sacrifice. They finally broke and went to the rear to reform, and then advance again. So deadly were the losses of the Irish Brigade, that the officers of one regiment at least (63d) ordered the men to fire lying down, and then turn over and load their guns again and again.

Flesh and blood could not stand up before that death-dealing sheet of flame, and live. This uneven contest was kept up by the five regiments for hours, when their cartridges were exhausted, and then "fall back to the rear" was given, which they did in good order, losing many men while doing so from artillery fire.

This useless sacrifice of life was kept up all day on the 13th, and well into the night, by Sumner's troops. Many regiments that had advanced positions were unable to leave with safety in daylight, but succeeded in getting to the rear after dark, abandoning their dead and wounded. This

stupid and insane method of warfare was prolonged during the 14th, until the shades of night mercifully ended the unequal and bloody contest.

“Fox’s Losses In the American Civil War,” a volume adopted by the War Department, gives Burnside’s killed, wounded and missing at Fredericksburg at 12,653. To be more precise, the regimental losses are reported as follows, in Meagher’s Brigade, viz:

63d New York—Killed, 2; wounded, 38; missing, 4. Total, 44.

69th New York—Killed, 10; wounded, 95; missing, 23. Total, 128.

88th New York—Killed, 17; wounded, 97; missing, 13. Total, 127.

116th Pennsylvania—Killed, 7; wounded, 67; missing, 14. Total, 88.

28th Massachusetts—Killed, 14; wounded, 124; missing, 20. Total, 158.

In that single battle the five regiments of the Brigade lost in the aggregate 545, or sufficient to make a good sized regiment.

Its losses in killed and died of wounds in the five regiments in the War of the Rebellion were: 63d, 156; 69th, 259; 88th, 151; 28th Massachusetts, 250; 116th Pennsylvania, 145. Total, 961.

It was certainly providential that Lee was in ignorance of the movement of Burnside’s Army on the night of December 14, when the order was sent abroad in the ranks that a night attack with the bayonet on the Confederate lines would be attempted, soon as the shades of night covered Fred-

ericksburg with its mantle. Hours passed, and Lee's veterans waited during the chilly December night, but no hostile sound came from the Union Army. But daylight revealed, to the astonished thousands on the bristling heights, a vacated city, and the Yankee Army on the northern bank of the Rappahannock. The three bridges had disappeared before daylight as if by magic.

But the Confederates held possession of the dead, wounded and a few thousand prisoners.

That, in truth, was a "lost opportunity," that never again presented itself to the Confederacy.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Irish American, of this city, published a remarkable poem, from the pen of Eleanor Rogers Cox. I offer no apology in adding it to this sketch to show that the fair writer must have inherited in no small degree the combativeness of the "Fighting Race."

VETERANS OF FREDERICKSBURG.

To the surviving members of Meagher's Irish Brigade on the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1912:

Who are these who hither marching down the vale of misty
years,
From the heights where now the cannon's lips are dumb,
From the field where Meagher led them, from the field where
Valor sped them,
All in broken but undaunted column come.

Old men, brave men, men of Irish birth!
Men who on the forehead of their dear new land afar,
Set the name of Ireland, of their knightly sireland,
There to shine forever like a star!

Fredericksburg! the name is graven on the memories of men,
In immortal script of thunder and of flame,
And your comrades there who perished, lo! of God and Free-
dom cherished,
Gleams their deed upon the fairest height of Fame!

Fontenoy and Fredericksburg! Inscribe them side by side;
Sarsfield, Dillon, Meagher, all men of the Brigade—
Who for every friendship given to their land beneath high
Heaven
In the coinage of their heart's fair valor paid.

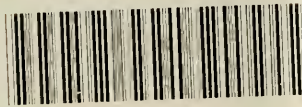
Through your veins what hero-fire leaped upon that day!
What immortal heritage of fear-defying mirth,
As with cheer outringing, your bouyant ranks went springing
Forward to the breastworks o'er corpse-bestrewn earth!

"Forward to the breastworks!" from out the smoke and flame
Belched forth from Mary's Heights, we pluck the deathless
word!
And the motto of your giving shall be motto of our living
Wheresoever sound of Irish speech is heard!

Brave men, true men, men of the Brigade!
Men who followed Meagher of the Sword!
Look, how glows the God lit ember of that day in far
December.
How its memory in our inmost soul is stored!



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 706 751 1

